

## **We're driving less -- even with cheaper gas Changing habits? Utah motorists among tops in nation for cutting down our miles.**

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Americans drove less in October even as gasoline prices tapered, and almost no one hit the brakes harder than Utahns.

U.S. motorists traveled 9 billion fewer miles this October than last, and Utahns cut back by 164 million miles, or 7.4 percent, according to the Federal Highway Administration's monthly report on traffic volume. Only Montana's driving slipped more, at 8.4 percent.

The miles fell away even faster in October than in May, when fuel prices were on a painful upswing and Utahns cut back on driving by 4.4 percent. In October, regular self-serve gas started its current slide in the Beehive State, from \$3.66 per gallon on the 1st to just under \$3 on the 27th, according to AAA Utah.

The earlier price spike rearranged priorities, causing some motorists to consolidate trips instead of running off to the store whenever they caught a whim.

That's how it was for Raymond Petersen, a Cokeville, Wyo., resident who is on a Mormon mission in Salt Lake City this fall. He was back home during the \$4-a-gallon days, and it made him skip formerly routine 33-mile shopping trips to Montpelier, Idaho.

Now he has the luxury of living downtown and walking to the Salt Lake LDS Temple, but he expects the price shock will have changed his habits even when he returns home to the country.

"It's helped me think, 'Hey, you don't need to make that trip,' " he said.

The October miles -- calculated from 4,000 traffic counters across the nation  
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-- still reflect some high pump prices, along with frightening nationwide economic news, AAA Utah spokeswoman Rolayne Fairclough said. People were scrimping. But they also were changing their travel patterns.

"People have indeed changed their driving habits," Fairclough said, "and maybe the higher prices introduced people to transit -- people who haven't used transit before."

The Utah Transit Authority's ridership gains slackened in October from summertime highs, although TRAX trains and buses carried about 11 percent more people in the month than they did in October 2007.

But some Utahns acknowledged Friday that the Wasatch Front's current \$1.50-a-gallon gas -- or less -- was getting them behind the wheel more.

"We're back to our old habits, which is probably not a good thing," said Eric Andersen, who accompanied his wife from Logan for a shopping trip at Salt Lake City's Gateway mall.

Chalk the Andersens up for at least 162 miles toward Utah's December driving tally. They probably wouldn't have made the trip south if gas still cost twice as much, he said.

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